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SUBJECT: ASEAN TO EU: "NO BURMA, NO ASEAN"

Classified By: P/E Chief W. Patrick Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a show of unity, ASEAN countries have agreed to pull out of a September 16-17 ASEM Economic Ministerial Meeting. This follows a decision by the Dutch government, in accordance with the EU's Common Position on Burma, to deny a visa to the senior Burmese delegate. According to Rangoon-based EU and Japanese diplomats, the ASEAN boycott has scuttled the entire Ministerial. ASEAN's willingness to support Burma's inclusion in ASEM no doubt brings satisfaction to the ruling generals. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) According to diplomatic sources in Rangoon, the Dutch government denied a visa to Soe Tha, Burmese Minister of National Planning and Economic Development, to attend the sixth Asia-Europe (ASEM) Economic Ministerial Meeting, scheduled to take place in Rotterdam on September 16-17.

¶3. (C) Japanese Embassy officers told us that ASEAN Foreign Ministers met in New York this week on the margins of the UNGA to discuss the visa development and agreed that all ten ASEAN countries would refuse to attend the Rotterdam meeting, apparently scuttling the entire Ministerial. The Japanese officers said that the GOJ was deeply concerned the Dutch had made a bilateral decision on an issue that had significant implications for relations between Asia and Europe. British and French diplomats, however, have told us that the Dutch decision was squarely in line with the EU Common Position on Burma, which includes a ban on visas for senior regime officials.

¶4. (C) Comment: It has been a tough week in New York for Burma and its Foreign Minister. Secretary Rice and UNSYG Kofi Annan both singled out Burma in their respective meetings with ASEAN leaders, citing the regime's serious shortcomings with regard to political and human rights reforms. Thus, ASEAN's collective decision to rally in response to the EU visa decision allows FM Nyan Win to return to Rangoon with news that will no doubt bring some satisfaction to the ruling generals. The EU decision, however, does highlight the regime's lack of legitimacy with the broader international community. End Comment.

Villarosa